

Guinea-Bissau

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Freedom of the Press

The latest episode in Guinea-Bissau's history of political instability—an April 2012 coup in which the prime minister and interim president were arrested by the military—led to a sharp deterioration in press freedom. The military authorities imposed restrictions on coverage and harassed, attacked, and threatened journalists. Though civilian rule has nominally returned under a transitional administration installed in May 2012, the chilling effect of martial law on the press remained in 2013 with pervasive fear and self-censorship.

Freedoms of expression and the press are guaranteed in the 1993 constitution and a 2005 law. However, these rights are restricted in practice due to the existence of criminal laws banning libel, abuse of press freedom, and violation of state secrets. There is no legislation guaranteeing the right to access information.

Similar to earlier periods of political turmoil, the 2012 coup was followed by a news blackout. The military temporarily shuttered all radio and television stations, leaving only the state-owned Rádio Nacional to broadcast music and directives to the population. As of January 2013, only the weekly government newspaper *Nô Pintcha* remained in circulation, with all other newspapers shut down due to the lack of affordable newsprint. Rádio Bombolom, one of the main opposition-oriented stations, ceased broadcasts for several days in September 2013 after one of its commentators, Justino Sá, was interrogated by military intelligence and charged with defamation for criticizing the government over its patterns of promoting military officers.

In the aftermath of the coup, journalists found themselves under threat from the military, and while there were no reports of physical attacks on journalists in Guinea-Bissau in 2013, an environment of fear and intimidation persisted. In addition to coup-related repression, media workers in recent years have experienced increasingly harsh treatment at the hands of those with close connections to South American drug traffickers, including government officials, members of the military, and private citizens. Since 2009, at least three journalists have fled into exile due to threats related to their reporting on drug trafficking in the country. The resulting climate of fear has led to a significant amount of self-censorship, with many journalists afraid to cover drug- or military-related issues. Impunity is the norm for government and military officials who abuse members of the press.

Nô Pintcha operates alongside several less-prominent private print outlets. The state-run Rádio Televisão de Guinea-Bissau and the Portuguese-run RTP's Africa service operate the country's two television networks, though RTP has been threatened with closure in the past. A number of private radio stations compete with the state-run radio broadcaster. The press in Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest countries, is plagued by financial instability, lack of resources, and low salaries. With only one state-owned printing press, publications have historically struggled with high costs, slow production, and limited supplies of affordable newsprint; early in the year a number of private outlets had to stop printing due to newsprint shortages. Broadcast outlets face unreliable electricity that hinders steady operations. Although many young people continue to pursue careers in journalism, the lack of resources hampers growth.

Around 3 percent of the population had access to the internet in 2013. No governmental restrictions are apparent, though a lack of equipment and infrastructure drastically limits access to the internet in practice. Several online news outlets such as *Bissau Digital* contribute to the information environment.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Not Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

67

Legal Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

19

Political Environment

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

29

Economic Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

19